



## Stanford eCorner

### The Powerful Alignment of Interests

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Sheer brainpower, strength in numbers, and good old fashioned networking is how the nature of world influence is established. Skewed and disproportionate, modern power structures that regulate global problems happen only when the elite meet, says author David Rothkopf. And decisions made based on these meetings often do not adequately represent the people or the interests that they are meant to serve.



#### Transcript

The reality is it's not conspiracy. What brings this group, its power, is that very often this very different, this very diverse people find that their interests align. And when the interests of the most powerful align about taxes or about regulation or about politics or about global warming, they have - wait for it - more power than the least powerful people, right? And there is a multiplication that comes from the networks that connect them together. And so this is an extremely important component of their power. Another important component of their power has to do with the byproduct of the networks. I go to Davos every year or I used to go to Davos every year. After writing this book, I don't know if I'll be invited back to Davos because I told some of the secrets of Davos which don't, by the way, involve people going into a backroom and planning France's GDP is going to go up and hemlines are going to go down. There is not that kind of planning in Davos. In fact, Davos is a little bit like this. It's kind of a big bloviation festival where people go into rooms to try and find something interesting and very seldom do, by the way.

I was talking to Steve Case, the founder of AOL, and he said, "You know, one of the problems with Davos is the feeling like I'm always in the wrong place, and that the real action is in some other room or some other hotel or some other quarter or some place." But when I come back, he said, "What was the punch line? What came out of this?" And ultimately, the conclusion that I reach was that Davos is the factory where global conventionalism is manufactured. But that's the real power of an event like that, that you can get a couple of thousand really important government business leaders together and have them talk through global warming or Iraq or some other issue and have them, sort of, stick their finger in the air and say, "Well, he's a CEO and she's a... well, it's a woman, so she's probably not a CEO, but he's a CEO." And they feel this way, so I'm kind of comfortable with that. And then they go back to their countries and their companies and they have disproportionate influence and they control means of influence and that view becomes a more predominant view. Now, you might say, Well, wait a minute. That's not the same thing as running the world in secret cabals and you're absolutely right because the world's not run in secret cabals. What it is about is the real nature of power. And the problem with the real nature of power is that it's skewed. It's disproportionate. And the tools that we have historically used to balance it out, tools of governance, tools in which the consent of the governed is that criteria by which we grant legitimacy to such an enterprise, don't exist on the global stage anymore. And that's the real innovation challenge for our time.

That's a much harder problem than solving cancer or global warming.